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PSI AND HEMI-SYNC® (PART II)

by Linda Leblanc

In this second article, Linda continues the discussion of her psychic phenomena studies at the Rhine Research Center (RRC) Institute for Parapsychology in Durham, North Carolina, during its 1997 Summer Studies Program (SSP). See the summer 1998 TMI FOCUS for Part I.

Having had a number of out-of-body experiences (OOBEs) and having noticed an increase in their frequency with the use of Hemi-Sync, I was particularly interested in learning what researchers who apply scientific methods had to say about this phenomenon. OOBEs seem to have a cross-cultural distribution and have been reported throughout the ages. In the past three decades, they have been the subject of serious research by a number of parapsychologists, due possibly to an increased interest in non-ordinary states of consciousness. Various testable theories to explain OOBEs have emerged, with the psychological predominating. These theories generally fall into two categories: paranormal or ecsomatic, from the Greek exo (out) and soma (body), which implies that something actually leaves the body; and imaginal. The imaginal theories postulate that the OOBEE is a hallucinatory experience related to various psychological conditions, such as distortion of body image, depersonalization, lucid dreams, and sensory input disruption.

Parapsychologists are interested in OOBEs for several reasons. Researchers look for objective evidence of psi because they are reluctant to rely solely on subjective experience. OOBEs may be accompanied by ESP (extrasensory perception), which can provide veridical evidence of psi, but this, of course, does not necessarily confirm that an OOBEE as such has occurred. During a controlled experiment, the subject experiencing an OOBEE might be asked to report back on an object hidden somewhere in a nearby location, above eye level. If successful, this could provide independent evidence of psi functioning. The study of OOBEs induced in controlled laboratory conditions contributes information about the physiological state of the subject. This could provide hints on how to produce this state, possibly leading to a fuller understanding of the nature of the experience and of ESP. Another reason why OOBEs interest psychic researchers is the possible implication for survival after death. If “something” actually leaves the physical body during an OOBEE, perhaps this “something” survives physical death. But, as John Palmer of the RRC points out, even if scientists demonstrate that a measurable substance leaves the body, this does not of itself indicate that the substance possesses consciousness or that it is able to survive the death of the biological body for any appreciable time.

Much OOBEE research has followed a pattern similar to that of survival research. At the turn of this century, there were attempts to weigh dying patients, to determine if something actually

left the body at the time of death. Several patients did exhibit sudden weight loss and the researcher thought that this might be attributed to the soul's leaving the body. One problem with the weight-loss hypothesis is that it assumes that whatever leaves the body occupies space and has weight. Similar attempts were made to register the presence of a physical entity during OOBEs. In one such experiment, strain gauge fluctuations during the ESP segment of the OOBEE provided evidence suggestive of the presence of the subject's "externalized mind" at the target location. Another experiment used the OOBEE's cat as a detector, with some positive results.

During the 1960s, Charles Tart, then at the University of California at Davis, conducted a series of experiments with Bob Monroe, with the aim of inducing OOBEEs in a lab setting. Physiological monitoring showed great variability in Bob's EEG patterns, with unusually high theta waves, and also that he spent considerable time in hypnagogic states. Despite much discomfort caused by the monitoring equipment, Bob reported two OOBEEs during the sessions, in one of which he reported seeing a man with the female technician, who was normally alone. This was later verified by the technician. Tart, who recommended that future OOBEE research concentrate on these borderline states, hypothesized that at least some of Bob's OOBEEs might be a mixture of dreaming and "something else." While to many of us TMLers, this may seem an extremely conservative statement, nonetheless it was an important conclusion from a prominent researcher.

At RRC we also learned that a variety of subjective psychic experiences, such as clairvoyance, telepathy, channeling, mediumship, and OOBEEs, are often connected with depersonalization or dissociative phenomena. The Dissociative Disorders Interview Schedule (DDIS), which is a reference "bible" for diagnosing dissociative disorders (e.g., schizophrenia), contains many references to psychic experiences. In 1991, Douglas Richards of Atlantic University, Virginia Beach, Virginia, reported the results of a survey on subjective psychic experiences. Its aim was to study the correlation between subjective psychic experiences and dissociative experiences. There's no need to worry; the results showed only a moderate correlation with dissociation. The dissociation was not necessarily associated with pathology, so don't call for the guys in the white coats just yet! The subjects were 184 attendees at conferences at the Association for Research and Enlightenment (A.R.E.), an organization that was established to research and to promote the readings and teachings of psychic Edgar Cayce; it also studies various types of psychic phenomena. The respondents were well-educated, middle-class adults, with a high incidence of psychic experiences. When taken in the context of other surveys of the general population, the results confirmed that psychic experiences are a common occurrence in nonclinical populations. Slightly over 80 percent of the subjects felt that their psychic experiences had a positive or inspiring effect on their lives. Around 33 percent reported having spontaneous OOBEEs at least once, with an additional 17 percent indicating OOBEEs more than five times.

These findings are consistent with a 1974 psychic experiences questionnaire of the general population, in Charlottesville, Virginia, conducted by John Palmer (now of the RRC), which revealed that over half of the respondents claimed at least one ESP experience. There was also a tendency for persons reporting psychic or psi-related experiences to claim a large number of them. OOBEs were reported by 25 percent of University of Virginia students, with the town sample being 14 percent. Many indicated that psychic experiences affected their attitude toward life. Once again, the results from this particular survey were comparable to those of other questionnaires.

In the area of apparitions, the SSP covered a 1995 investigation into the alleged haunting of a house in Texas. The psychic researchers ("ghostbusters") reached a most interesting conclusion. The strange noises and lights, seen and heard by the frightened occupants of the house as well as by the investigators, were thought to be the result of electromagnetic fields around geologic fault lines. A combination of limestone, underground water, and a geologic fault produced an ultrasonic impulse that created a magnetic effect on the human brain, leading to hallucinations. This type of research is extremely useful, as a natural cause was found for what at first appeared to be inexplicable phenomena. It is indeed important, when evaluating such phenomena, to be aware of unusual physical forces that may be exerting a perfectly natural, i.e., non-paranormal, influence.

Psi phenomena often accompany the quest for deeper understanding of ourselves. Spontaneous anomalous experiences of a psychic or mystical nature, in my opinion, have the potential to shift our belief structure from that of a purely materialistic world to one which encompasses a far wider perception of reality. Anecdotal evidence of Hemi-Sync users suggests that this frequently happens. In my experience with Hemi-Sync, I've seen a gradual "thinning" of my individual or personal boundaries, which has both given me a glimpse of a greater whole and encouraged me to explore the resulting expansion of consciousness. Cultural conditioning may lead us to dismiss such events, but if one is able to understand and to integrate them in a meaningful way, one can emerge with new concepts of oneself as a conscious creature. Parapsychologist Rhea White coined a fitting term "exceptional human experience" to describe these phenomena.

Those interested in exploring psychic phenomena on the Internet will find plenty of web sites to surf, with options for participating in online psi experiments. RRC is a good starting place with its great links to other parapsychology labs. Go to rhine.org

See also Psi and Hemi-Sync (Part 1) (TMI Focus, Vol. XX, No. 3, Summer 1998) (Perceptual Studies/Psychokinesis)

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